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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7184
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0905
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4465
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7996
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5557
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3510
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1337
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000116

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DEPT FOR EAP/MLS; INR/EAP; S/ES-O
PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION TO MAY REFERENDUM IN BURMA

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for reasons 1.5
(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The NLD successfully celebrated Union Day on February 12, with no interference by the regime. One veteran activist used the opportunity to give a (uncharacteristically) rousing speech to more than 400 people, criticizing the regime's mismanagement, declaring the regime's draft constitution a sham, and demanding the release of political prisoners. Several opposition groups, including the 88 Generation Students and the Shan National League for Democracy, also issued statements against the regime's roadmap to democracy. The regime charged U Gambira and his brother of illegally crossing Burma's border, a crime that holds a maximum penalty of five years in prison. End Summary.

NLD Event A Success

12. (C) More than 400 people, including ethnic politicians, democracy activists, and diplomats, attended the National League for Democracy's Union Day celebration, held on February 12 at NLD Headquarters. Another fifty plain-clothes officers watched the event from across the street, taking photos of all participants and attendees, including Charge. At the beginning of the event, approximately 20 activists protested in front of NLD Headquarters, shouting for the release of all political prisoners and a real effort for national reconciliation. The police have not yet arrested any of these protestors.

13. (C) During the hour and a half event, NLD members and other activists spoke about Burma's deteriorating economy and criticized the regime's roadmap to democracy and its plans for a national referendum. The NLD Central Executive Committee issued its Union Day Statement, in which it designated 2008 as the Year of National Reconciliation, called for political dialogue, urged the release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi and U Tin Oo, and requested that the GOB permit all political parties to operate freely in Burma. U Thu Wai, Chairman of the

Democracy Party and member of the Veteran Politicians Group, gave a rousing speech, in which he pointed out that government was not working for the people. He noted that Burma had gone backward while its neighbors were moving forward. Instead, the GOB's poor economic management led to inflated prices, affecting all Burmese. The draft constitution was a sham, as it was drafted by the regime's handpicked delegates, he continued. This is not democracy, he declared to a thunderous crowd.

¶4. (C) The NLD also secretly organized a Union Day dinner, which sixty activists and ethnic politicians attended. Unlike last year, government authorities did not disrupt the event. Attendees discussed the government's recent call for a referendum in May and elections by 2010, with most agreeing that the regime had predetermined the election without knowing whether the referendum would pass. They also questioned whether the regime would pre-designate the winner of the elections.

Opposition Groups Issue Statements

¶5. (C) In response to the GOB's recent announcement of a national referendum in May and promise for multi-party elections by 2010 (Ref A), several opposition groups issued critical statements of the government's roadmap. On February 9, the Shan National League for Democracy declared that the current political, economic, and social conditions in Burma continue to deteriorate because of GOB policies. The organization demanded that the regime release political prisoners, including Shan and other ethnic leaders, and called on the government to begin a true and inclusive

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dialogue with the people.

¶6. (C) The 88 Generation Students issued a fiery statement on February 11, denouncing the upcoming referendum as a "declaration of war by the military regime against the people of Burma." The regime will use its security forces and USDA thugs to force people to vote in favor of the constitution, 88 Generation Students asserted, adding they were ready to confront the military. The statement also called on the UN Security Council to issue a binding resolution on Burma, as well as requested the UN Secretary General visit Burma.

Additional Charges

¶7. (C) According to Ma Khin Thu Htay, sister of imprisoned monk U Gambira, the regime on February 11 charged U Gambira and his brother Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw with illegally crossing the Burmese border, a violation of the Immigration Department's temporary law 13/1. NLD lawyer U Aung Thein told us that the maximum penalty for violating this law is five years in prison. The regime in January charged U Gambira and his brother of violating the Unlawful Association Act (Ref B), which carries a three-year maximum sentence. Ma Khin Thu Htay told us that both U Gambira and Ko Aung Kyaw Kyaw were in good health.

Comment

¶8. (C) The pro-democracy activists doubt that Than Shwe's announced referendum represents any significant step forward, given the non-transparent process to date, the huge numbers of political prisoners, and the refusal of the regime to engage in serious dialogue. The 88 Generation Students' statement sounds like a call to action. The heartiest applause at the NLD event went to the person who attacked the regime. Although we see no evidence that people will take to the streets in the coming days, we think the prospects for more protests are increasing if Than Shwe persists in trying to ram through his sham constitution.

